THE REVIEW OF A FREE ENQUIRY INTO THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF EVIL.

Περιν μεν γαρ ζωεσκον επι χθονα φυλ' ανθρωπων,
Νοσφιν ατερτε κακων, και ατερ χαλεποιο πονοιο,
Νουσων τ' αργαλεων, αιτ' ανδρασι γηρας εδωκαν.

HES.

Scarcely an ill to human life belongs,
But what our follies cauſe, or mutual wrongs.

JENNINGS's *Eſſ. on Virtue.*

LONDON,
Printed for W. FLEXNEY, near *Gray's Inn Gate, Holbourn.*
MDCCLIX.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

3 Ho

PREFACE.

SUBJECTS remote from human underſtanding ought not to be thought on, much leſs argued upon, but with diffidence. And certainly, no ſubjects can be more remote, than ſuch as relate to the ways and deſigns of Providence. Such as, preſuming too much on the weak powers of their idol Reaſon, affect to argue as clearly, and decide as peremptorily, on the higheſt and moſt abſtruſe ſubjects, as on things of no moment, and the moſt ordinary occurrencies in life;

——————— Who *reaſon high*
Of Providence, Fore-knowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fix'd Fate; Free-will, Fore-knowledge abſolute;
Will *find no end in wandring mazes loſt.*
MILT.

" We are not, *as an ingenious au-*
" *thor obſerves,* ſo high in the ſcale of
" exiſtence as our ignorant ambition
" may deſire*." And " there is no-
" thing leads us into ſo many errors
" concerning the works and deſigns
" of Providence, as that fooliſh va-
" nity*." Though reaſon and thoſe active faculties of the mind were never given us to lie dormant, or to be

* Free Enquiry, p. 35. 69.

confined

confined to the paultry concerns of this life; yet doubtleſs he is leſs culpable who ſuffers his talent to lie concealed and uſeleſs, than he who ſquanders it away in hurtful extravagant whims. And ſuch notions cannot be abſolutely inoffenſive, as tend to indulge the ſenſualiſt in his vices, and furniſh him with an excuſe for the groſſeſt immoralities, the ſpecious plea of the frailty and imperfection of human nature.

If we examine the reaſonings of the ancient philoſophers upon providence, fate, &c. we ſhall find them full of perplexity, doubts, and incon-

conſiſtencies: which may ſerve to ſhew how unequal human reaſon is to ſpeculations of ſo refined a nature. If modern diſputants have argued on ſuch ſubjects with greater acuteneſs and perſpicuity; it is not becauſe they are ſuperior to the ancients in genius: but, however backward ſome may be to acknowledge it; this their ſuperiority can be aſcribed to no other cauſe, than the ſtrong light that Chriſtianity has reflected on thoſe and the like ſubjects: and which, if duly attended to, will conduct a candid and rational enquirer if not not exactly to the truth, at leaſt pretty near it in many abſtruſe and metaphyſical reſearches.

es. And though no ſtickler for the weak outworks of ancient error, I am ſure it may be ſafely aſſerted, that no one ever rejected thoſe lights which the Scriptures have held out to him, who did not find himſelf involved in much more error and perplexity under the guidance of unaſſiſted reaſon; than he could have been expoſed to, if by a too great affectation of ſingularity he had not been tempted to put aſunder reaſon and revelation: which, by a happy union and congruity, God has, in the religion of Chriſt, reconciled and made one. And therefore they are equally culpable, who aſcribe to human reaſon either too much, or nothing

nothing at all. Chriſtianity is to be explained by reaſon; and in the inveſtigation of all ſpeculative truth, reaſon will derive great advantage from the aſſiſtance of Chriſtianity; and both, by this their mutual aid and concurrence, contribute

- *To juſtify the ways of God to man.*

MILT.

THE

THE REVIEW OF A FREE ENQUIRY, &c.

IN an Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil, the ingenious Author has treated a ſubject of the abſtruſeſt nature in ſo elegant a manner, as to afford entertainment as well as inſtruction. In ſome of his obſervations he has diſcovered candor; in many is a great deal of truth; and he has reflected new light upon ſeveral points that were before but faintly apprehended. But, by giv-

ing too great ſcope to the wild flights of his own fancy, his aſſertions appear not always ſo ſtrongly ſupported by reaſon, as might be expected. And indeed weak reaſoning and falſe deductions there muſt be, when an author has hit upon ſome darling ſyſtem, and then racks his imagination for any thing that may bear the ſhadow of an argument to ſupport it.

Unſatisfied with the received opinion concerning the Origin of Evil, he ſuppoſes it owing ſolely to the neceſſity of human nature: That is, that evil was ſo intimately inwoven in the frame and conſtitution of man, that he neither was, nor ever could be, abſolutely and entirely free from it. In order to make

way

way for this novel ſuppoſition, the firſt grand obſtacle to be removed is, the notion of a primœval ſtate of innocence: which is founded on tradition, hiſtory, and, as many have been induced to think, on reaſon too. For does it not ſeem moſt abſurd and irreconcileable with the notions we have of ſpirit and matter, to ſuppoſe that an omnipotent, all-wiſe, all-juſt God ſhould endow a being with the faculty of reaſon; yet ſubject that divine particle* to the arbitrary power and wildneſs of the paſſions: a part of his compoſition, which he has in common with the brute creation? For in this degree man ſtands in the chain of nature, a compound being participating of the different natures

* Divinæ particulam auræ. HOR.

of ſpirit and matter; and thus fills up the vaſt gap that would otherwiſe exiſt between angels and brutes. Is it not moſt contrary to reaſon then, to ſuppoſe ſuch a being endued with a knowledge of good and evil; convinced of what is right by the higheſt of his faculties, yet neceſſarily determined to what is wrong, and acting under the influence of the meaneſt of them? But let us conſider reaſon, and it is certainly more agreeable to the wiſdom of God, as well as the dignity of man, that we ſhould ſo conſider it, as given him to controul his paſſions, and regulate his deſires; and we ſhall then diſcern a true and noble end in this high prerogative which his benevolent Creator hath veſted in him. If it was not aſſigned him

for

for this uſe, it is impoſſible to find out for what purpoſe it was conferred on him, unleſs to afford him a deeper ſenſe of the unavoidable evil that is ſet before him: and man, the lord of the creation, will in this view appear to be the riddle of it. If it was aſſigned him for this purpoſe and intent; both the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Deity are concerned in its ſufficiency to anſwer the end deſigned, viz. the government of our paſſions. From whence it will appear, that ſin or moral evil, which is nothing elſe than an inordinate ſally of the paſſions, is owing ſolely to a neglect of properly exerting reaſon; and is a perverſion of that ſubordination which God eſtabliſhed between reaſon and the paſſions. And hence too it

follows, that ſome ſpace of time muſt have intervened between the firſt eſtabliſhment of that order and harmony, which ſubſiſted in every part of the creation, when 'God ſaw that all was good,' and the perverſion of it.

Yet this notion of a Paradiſaical ſtate, or age of innocence, the author affirms to be an "amuſing dream, and as abſurd in philoſophy as in poetry delightful *;" which is an affirmation without proof, and by conſequence ſufficiently anſwered by a denial. But he adds, that "ſuch a ſtate of perfection †, "*he thinks*, might be proved impoſſible, both from the nature of this terreſtrial globe, and the nature of its

* Orig. of Evil, p. 10. † *Ibid.* p. 11.

"inhabi-

" inhabitants." The misfortune is, his conjectures, however ingenious, will never paſs for arguments: nor, till he had ſhewed the impoſſibility of a doctrine, which has hiſtory and tradition in its favour, had he any right to reject it for a fanciful ſuppoſition of his own. And to prove a ſtate of perfect innocence merely poſſible, is a full confutation of the opinion he advances in its ſtead.

" The Stoicks, *he remarks*, ſeem to " have had ſome dark and unintelligi- " ble notions of this inherent imperfec- " tion in the nature of all created be- " ings *." Dark and unintelligible as their notions may appear; they approach

* Orig. of Evil, p. 19.

much nearer the truth, than the doctrines of any other of thoſe ancient ſages, who took upon them to inſtruct the heathen world in the precepts of religion and morality: a ſtrong proof this of the neceſſity of a revelation to ſet us right in theſe important ſubjects. Indeed, ſo ſtrongly do our paſſions plead with us for gratification, ſo prevalent is the influence of vice in our corrupt nature, derived from cuſtom and example; that it is no wonder if to thoſe, who took their notions chiefly from what they felt paſs within themſelves, and had only the faint glimmerings of reaſon to direct them in their enquiries, moral evil ſhould appear, as confirmed and inveterate habits uſually do, to ſpring from the very conſtitution of human nature. But there is a well-

known

known tenet of the Stoicks, which plainly ſhews, that *their* notions of human nature were, in fact, very different from thoſe, which ſuppoſe an innate imperfection in it. They accounted nothing a real evil, but the evil of ſin*: and this they ſuppoſed no neceſſary inherent fault in human nature; as appears clear in that they acknowledge a ſtate of perfect happineſs attainable. The perfectly wiſe man, ſay they, is perfectly virtuous; and being perfectly virtuous, he is neceſſarily free from all real evil, and conſequently perfectly happy. Here then we find a ſect of philoſophers aſſerting the reality of a ſtate of perfection on the principles of reaſon; which, wild and extravagant as ſuch tenets are,

* Nihil eſt malum; niſi quod turpe atque vitioſum eſt. Cic. Tuſc. Diſp.

with

with reſpect to the preſent depraved condition, and perverted order of things, ſeems to me ſtrongly to confirm the truth of ſuch a ſtate having exiſted: unleſs their notions are abſolutely and entirely without any foundation at all.

Having premiſed theſe few obſervations in regard to the poſſibility of a ſtate of innocence, the more cloſely to confine myſelf, in the ſequel, to the thoughts and arguments of the author, I will obſerve the plan he has laid down, and prepare to follow him thro' the gloomy ranks of evil. One claſs of which are acknowledged to be no evils at all; another we ſhall find to be evils of our own contracting; and all the reſt, their vitiated progeny.

SECT.

SECT. II.

THE evils of imperfection, as they are termed, the author has juſtly ſtruck out of the black catalogue.

Nemo miſer, niſi comparatus;

is an old obſervation. And what is there remarked of the perſon labouring under evils, is equally applicable to evils of this denomination themſelves. Which, as they are only a privation of ſome good we ſee by others enjoyed, can have no foundation but in compariſon. Weakneſs and deformity are indeed comparative evils, conſidered in reſpect to beauty and ſtrength; but conſidered in reference to a greater defect of beauty and of ſtrength, they may as juſtly be denominated bleſſings. And even rea-

ſon

ſon itſelf, which we juſtly ſet ſo high a value on, in compariſon of intuitive knowledge may as properly be ſtyled an evil of imperfection, as any other.

There are real evils enough diſcernible in human nature, without torturing our invention in queſt of imaginary ones. If we content ourſelves with a rational enquiry into thoſe only which are properly our own, and to the introduction of which we ourſelves are unqueſtionably acceſſary; we ſhall find every other evil, that can be called really ſuch, by ſome ſecret connection reſulting from them, depending on them, and gradually increaſing with them. And if, in this depraved ſtate of things, we could reform from ſuch evils as are evidently

of

of our own contracting; all others, however ſeemingly innate, would neceſſarily vaniſh: and we ſhould find ourſelves to be, without any alteration in our nature, that happy, perfect creature, which tradition reports us, hiſtory repreſents us, and in thoſe ſtruggles that a virtuous man has with his paſſions, ever labouring after a height and degree of virtue, which yet he feels and acknowledges himſelf unable to attain to, reaſon ſeems to confirm us to have been.

SECT.

SECT. III.

THE queſtion which the author propoſes to ſolve in the next letter, is, "Why God, whoſe only motive in creating beings muſt be the production of happineſs, ſhould yet condemn them, by an abſolute neceſſity of nature, to innumerable and unavoidable miſeries *?" His ſolution of which difficulty is briefly this: "theſe evils could not have been prevented without the loſs of greater good †." But the queſtion preſuppoſes a fact that is abſolutely falſe, ſince thoſe evils can never be derived from a neceſſity of nature, from which ſome men are wholly

* Orig. of Evil, p. 46, 47, † *Ib.* p. 48.

exempt:

exempt: and he attempts to ſolve a ſeeming difficulty, by ſubſtituting a real one in its room. For, when it is aſſerted, that pains of body, inquietudes of mind, and the like evils, muſt fall on ſome, in order to promote the happineſs of others: will not the objector immediately aſk, How, and in what manner, the ſufferings of one man can, in a phyſical ſenſe, be ſuppoſed to conduce to the happineſs of another? Has the author offered any ſolution of this difficulty: or has he not acknowledged it *inconceivable* how they operate; and even, that they do ſo operate, to be only a mere probability * ? But why ſhould a daring genius ſtep out of the common road to attack the doctrines of a reli-

* Orig. of Evil. p. 67.

gion,

gion, that is founded on reaſon, and appeals to reaſon for its ſupport; and which is, beſides, the religion of his country, and would on that account in all well regulated ſtates be held inviolate, only to ſubſtitute in their room bare probabilities, and his own *inconceivable* notions?

But if we do not content ourſelves with a partial view of things, if we catch not too haſtily at every fanciful conceit that occurs to the mind, nor take up with bare matters of fact without endeavouring to acquaint ourſelves with the meaning of them; we ſhall find, that natural evils are no other than the evils that God has annexed as natural conſequences of our vices:

A truth this, prettily allegoriſed by the heathen poets, in the Fable of Pandora; who is feigned by an act of diſobedience to have introduced into the world all manner of evil.

—γυνη χειρεσσι πιθου μεγα πωμ' αφελουσα
Εσκεδασ', ανθρωποισι δ' εμησατο κηδεα λυγρα·
Αιψα γαρ εν κακοτητι βροτοι καταγηρασκουσι.
HER. περι εργ: ἡ ημ:

The fatal charge the curious fair unlocks;
Straight iſſuing from the interdicted box
Of ills a num'rous train with harſh alloy
Embitter life, and marr each former joy, &c.

Thoſe evils the author has comprehended under the following heads: Poverty, Labour, Inquietudes of Mind, Pains of Body, and Death. Whether they be really deducible from an abſolute neceſſity of nature, or the cauſe we

have ventured to aſſign, will be further ſeen by a diſtinct and impartial review of them.

With ſo little propriety can poverty be eſteemed an evil of nature; that at the beginning of the creation it was abſolutely impoſſible that poverty ſhould exiſt. For, as nature is content with little, our wants were originally few: and it was in every man's power to gratify his deſires, and provide himſelf with a ſufficient ſupply of whatever he judged neceſſary and conducive to the comforts and conveniences of life. This may fairly be ſuppoſed, without having recourſe to a ſuppoſition, which is no abſurd one, and would ſet the fact in a much clearer light; that the earth ſpontaneouſly

taneouſly produced her fruits, "the "herb yielding ſeed, and the tree yield- "ing fruit after its kind."

—— *Nulli ſubigebant arva coloni:*
Nec ſignare quidem, aut partiri limite campum
Fas erat: in medium quærebant: ipſaque tellus
Omnia liberius, nullo poſcente, ferebat.
VIRG.

It was ambition and avarice on the one hand, and diſſipation and indolence on the other, that produced poverty: and if there ever was a time when theſe moral evils did not ſubſiſt ‡; there was a time when the cry of poverty was not heard.

‡ See Review, p. 52, &c.

The conſequence of poverty is labour; and therefore primarily deducible from the ſame cauſe. By which term I underſtand, the drudgery and toils, which one part of mankind undergoes to ſupport the other in affluence and eaſe. For the labour, which it might be neceſſary for each individual to ſuſtain, in order to provide himſelf with the comforts and conveniences of life in a ſtate of nature, would not only be no evil, but a real good. Man is born to labour; and as our Creator has made it neceſſary to our ſubſiſtence, ſo alſo has he made it conducive to the health and vigour both of body and mind: and has likewiſe annexed to it a proper degree of pleaſure and ſatisfac-

tion. Some of the greateſt geniuſes that the world ever produced, ſuch too as have been moſt eminent for virtue, and who therein approached the neareſt to man's original perfection, have amuſed themſelves with the plough, the pruning-hook, and other rural employments. And if in the moſt obſcure retreat theſe interpoſing labours, ſeconding the pleaſing intereſting contemplations of the mind; if this harmonious concord of the intellectual and bodily faculties thus mutually aiding and relieving each other, cannot afford us a more ſubſtantial happineſs than any other pleaſures in life, however eagerly hunted after; it is becauſe of thoſe wretched refinements, which ſin, or moral evil, has effected in human nature.

The inquietudes of the mind muſt be acknowledged real, and perhaps the greateſt evils that human nature is liable to. Theſe, if we trace them to their true ſource, we ſhall find principally ariſe from remorſe at having committed what was wrong, and from bitter recollection of having omitted to do what was right. Which two cauſes of uneaſineſs, as they depend entirely on ourſelves, may in a great meaſure, even in the preſent ſtate of things, be precluded, by always impowering our reaſon to direct our actions: or, in other words, by ever doing that which we know to be right, and conſtantly avoiding what we ſuſpect to be otherwiſe*.

* It is a maxim laid down by the moraliſts; that, to doubt the rectitude of an action, is a

But

But all inquietudes of mind are not to be contracted within ſo narrow a compaſs. Whilſt we have paſſions, and ſo much moral evil abounds in the world, theſe paſſions will ſometimes unavoidably launch out into vicious extremes. We cannot forbear being troubled at the undutifulneſs of children, the ingratitude of thoſe whom we have obliged, the inſincerity of friends, and the infamous aſperſions of ſlander and malevolence. The Stoical apathy is abſolutely unattainable; and theſe diſquieting affections of the mind may be ſo far termed natural, as they work ſo forcibly and univerſally, that the moſt cool and diſpaſſionate

proof that it is not abſolutely and ſtrictly right; and therefore a ſufficient reaſon for declining it.

cannot be wholly inſenſible of them. Yet, who ſees not that they originally proceed from *moral* evils? Since, if there was no ſuch thing as ingratitude, ſlander, &c. the mind could ſuffer uneaſineſs on none of theſe accounts.

The pains of the body are evils more clearly and demonſtratively deducible from vice, than any of the former. They are certain conſequences of indolence, luxury, and intemperance: often derived from our own exceſſes; and often from thoſe of our anceſtors. Diſeaſe rolls in the chariot, and lolls upon the bed of down: our ſoups and delicate viands are full of theſe ills; they ſparkle in the intoxicating glaſs, and unnerve us in the embrace of harlots. If any one

one doubts whether human nature could ever be abſolutely free from that train of diſeaſes, which at preſent ſeem to reign almoſt univerſally; let him viſit the peaſant's cottage, and he will there find many inſtances of perſons, who have arrived at the verge of life, without ever experiencing the rackings of ſickneſs and diſeaſe: which amounts to a full proof, that theſe evils are not inherent in human nature, but are the wretched progeny of human vices. Let us then repreſent to ourſelves one of theſe happy ruſticks, who has almoſt finiſhed his courſe of life, with a conſcience ever void of offence, and a body free from aches and ſickneſs. Suppoſe him paſt through all the various ſcenes, that checquer human life, and heartily tired with the dull irkſome repetition

petition of a continual ſameneſs, as may very eaſily be the caſe; ſince perhaps all the pleaſures of life ariſe principally from novelty: and may he not meet the embraces of death with as much complacency and ſatisfaction, and perhaps too with as little pain, as he would ſink into the arms of its near relation, ſleep*? To ſuch an one can death be properly ſtyled an evil? Or, does it not rather deſerve the firſt place in the fair train of natural bleſſings†: as it not only delivers him from the tedioufneſs of ſuch thoughts as ſerve but to mortify him with the recollection of thoſe pleaſures, which he muſt never again enjoy; but,

* Conſanguineus leti ſopor. VIRG.

† Ut doceam, non modo non malum eſſe, ſed bonum etium eſſe, mortem. CIC.

now

now that every ſhort-lived gratification palls and ſickens upon him, opens to his view new ſcenes of untaſted happineſs? Let death then be diſcharged from the gloomy company of evils, into which the author has introduced him; and all the reſt are clearly owing not to the original imperfection of human nature, but the dreadful breaches that ſin hath made in it. For, as to thoſe accidental hurts, to which the body is liable, nor ever could be exempt from, ſuch as the fracture of a bone, the diſlocation of a joint, &c. they belong not to the claſs of evils here treated of, but are to be ranked under thoſe of imperfection. And it would be no leſs abſurd to arraign the goodneſs of God, for not making us of adamant and

ſteel,

ſteel, than for ſuffering our frame to be liable to ſuch harms as theſe.

Which then of all the various evils that man labours under, and are called natural, can be juſtly and properly imputed to the imperfection of his nature; which of all the numerous train is it *impoſſible* he could ever have been free from; or from whence can they be ſo rationally deduced, as from that grand ſource which they have been traced back to, moral evil? That foul fountain from whence iſſue all the ſtreams of evil, that flow through the vale of mortal life, and taint the happineſs for which man was originally deſigned, is the next ſubject of the author's Enquiry.

But

But before we proceed to that point, I ſhall, with all deference to his judgment, hazard my ſentiments of a fact, which he ſeems not thoroughly to have entered into the meaning of. Speaking of the analogy between pleaſure and pain, he obſerves, that * "many in Chriſtian countries have been "fainted for long faſting, for whipping "and tormenting themſelves, for ſit-"ting whole years in uneaſy poſtures, "&c. And that many at this day in "the Eaſt are almoſt deified for load-"ing themſelves with heavy chains, "bending under burthens, and the "like." From whence he ſuppoſes, that where theſe cuſtoms prevailed,

* Orig. of Evil, p. 63.

the

the people had ſome dark notions of the merit of ſufferings abſtracted from their tendency to any viſible good: which notions, he thinks, muſt be founded on the neceſſity of pain to produce happineſs. But the true reaſon of theſe practices appears eaſy to be aſcertained, without having recourſe to notions merely chimerical; and which, were they ever ſo true, can never be proved to be ſo. The fear of eternal miſery, becauſe diſtant, will on many minds operate leſs forcibly in deterring men from ſin, than the dread of a ſevere puniſhment being inflicted upon the immediate commiſſion of it: and even where that is not the caſe, this motive will always co-operate with, and enforce the other. And on this principle were inſtituted

thoſe

thoſe corporal puniſhments, which are ſtill practiſed by the Papiſts; ſometimes enjoined them by their confeſſors, and ſometimes their own voluntary act: neither are they conſidered in this view ſo abſolutely devoid of reaſon, as they have been generally repreſented. And as to thoſe, who walk barefoot, crouch under burthens, or load themſelves with chains; it is well known, that this variety of ſevere diſcipline is undergone, chiefly in order to move pity and compaſſion in the beholders: and ſo good an effect has it, that ſuch objects ſeldom fail of a plentiful alms. Another argument, which may perhaps plead the cauſe of theſe zealots more powerfully than pity, is a general perſuaſion, that the alms ſo diſpoſed of will be applied

to

to ſome good and pious uſe, as the founding of a moſque, an hoſpital, or the like: and, indeed, ſuch their intention is ſometimes ſpecified beforehand by the ſupplicants. Accordingly with the gain thus acquired, which is often very conſiderable, the devotee builds or endows a convent, or a moſque. And hence it is that the higheſt honours are ſometimes paid to them, as to common benefactors. For I will venture to affirm, that hiſtory cannot produce one ſingle inſtance in any age or nation, of the higheſt honours being decreed to perſons, who have voluntarily expoſed themſelves to ſufferings, abſtracted from their tendency to ſome viſible good.

SECT.

SECT. IV.

PErhaps the knowledge of no one ſpeculative truth is ſo natural and univerſal, as the knowledge of good and evil; nothing is ſo eaſy to be aſcertained, as when an action is really good, and when really evil. Yet ſcarce any thing ſeems to have perplexed moral writers more, than fully and properly to define them; as appears from the variety of definitions that are given of them, and which are almoſt as numerous as the authors, who have treated on the ſubject. Muſt it not ſeem ſtrange then, that, though the diſcernment of moral good and evil be as natural to the mind, as the perception of

light and darkneſs is to the eye; an immutable, univerſal principle, in which every man is ſelf-taught, yet no one has been able, by any ſatisfactory criterion to determine what it is, and wherein it conſiſts? Let the moſt rude and uncivilized man hear of a virtuous action, and he will naturally be pleaſed with it; and an evil action will proportionably diſguſt him. Aſk him why he diſlikes the one, and admires the other; and I am of opinion he would find it a very difficult matter to give a tolerable reaſon. Paradoxical as this may appear, there are facts in the natural world, ſuch as are the immediate objects of our ſenſes, that operate no leſs unaccountably. Who, for inſtance, has told us what beauty is, deduced it

to

to a general definition, or fixed the true ſtandard of it? Yet on ſight of a really beautiful object, taſtes however different concur in admiring it: and by a kind of inſtinctive knowledge, we perceive and confeſs the reality of beauty, in that we are charmed with the influence of it. From this diverſity of ſentiments therefore concerning the criterion of virtue, no argument can be brought againſt the reality of it: and if all the definitions we can form of it be imperfect, this can only be aſcribed to the narrowneſs of our ideas.

The definition propoſed by this author, confines virtue to a tendency to promote general good †, and is

† Orig. of Evil, p. 85.

therefore objectible to, as being too limited. To contribute to the general happineſs is certainly a branch of virtue, and a principal one too: but then this is only referable to our conduct in reſpect of others; and moral virtue may exiſt independent of it. Fortitude and reſolution in bearing the miſeries of life, is as unqueſtionably a virtue, as juſtice, benevolence, or any other moral duty whatever: but this relates wholly to a man's ſelf, and is naturally no more productive of public good, than evil; and which ever is conſequential of it is merely accidental. Hence then it appears that this criterion, though not falſe, is defective. It is true, that whatever contributes to the general bliſs, is virtuous: but it is

as

as true, that actions may be denominated virtuous, without having any natural tendency to publick utility. There are duties that we owe to God and ourſelves, ſuch as with reſpect to others may be ſtiled indifferent, the obſervance of which is nevertheleſs morally good, and for a diſregard and neglect of them we are juſtly chargeable with vice. Perhaps an inſtance may contribute to place this matter in a clearer light. Let us ſuppoſe that Cæſar was aſſaſſinated by his ſon; and, that by his death mankind was delivered from an oppreſſor, and the Roman commonwealth reſtored to liberty. If, according to the author, moral good is to be eſtimated by its tendency to general utility, this action of Brutus is abſo-

lutely good: yet parricide, according to all notions of right and wrong whatever, is abſolutely evil: but that an action ſhould be abſolutely good, and abſolutely evil at the ſame time, is a flat contradiction in terms. The truth is, an action, before it can be denominated virtuous, muſt, beſides contributing to the general good, have reſpect to him who does it, and his duty to himſelf; and alſo to the commands and prohibitions of him who has afforded us a rule of action, unleſs reaſon and conſcience were afforded us in vain. And whenever an action appears good with reſpect to theſe three relations, it may then be pronounced ſtrictly and in the higheſt degree virtuous. Virtues there are, or rather branches

of

of virtue, which regard each of theſe relations ſeparately, without interfering with either of the others. But when an action, however conformable to one of theſe relations, however productive of publick good, claſhes with either, or, as may be, with both the other; that action can with as little propriety be ſtiled a virtuous action, as the man, who by irreverence or neglect diſhonours his Creator; and by debauchery and voluptuouſneſs debilitates his body, and ſtupifies his mind, can be called virtuous; becauſe he pays his juſt debts, and makes his money circulate.

Not to rob then the nobleſt principle, that animates the human mind of more than half its praiſe, by confin-

ing it to a tendency to promote a little temporary good, which is not to be confined to the limits of this globe; nor yet to render it more unintelligible by ſubſtituting words inſtead of meaning, ſuch as we cannot perfectly underſtand ourſelves, and are therefore not likely to explain to others: let us content ourſelves with knowing in general terms that virtue is, as all definitions preſuppoſe it, an univerſal law, a rule of conduct ſtamped upon the mind of man from the beginning by his all-wiſe Creator. This was the law, which was originally afforded Adam to regulate his actions by: who was formed perfect according to the rank of human nature, with a healthful body, a clear and diſcerning mind. And how forci-

bly

bly it muſt act in the perfect ſtate of human nature, may be in ſome meaſure conceived from thoſe effects of it, which the mind depraved and corrupted as it is, ſtill ſtrongly experiences in the alarming dictates of conſcience. This was the law, which by vice and prejudice became in a courſe of ages ſo wretchedly perverted and obſcured, that Moſes was ſent to revive, explain, and enforce it: and which Chriſt came down from Heaven to perfect and fulfill. Where then ſhall we expect to find this almoſt obliterated principle? Not in the vague gueſſes of the fanciful ſpeculatiſt; nor yet in the doubtful diſquiſitions of ſophiſtry and metaphyſicks; nor indeed any where but in that univerſal law, which has been graciouſly diſpenſed to

us,

us, to ſupply its place. Juſtice, I make no doubt, was originally ſo clearly imprinted on the human mind, that men could not have miſtaken their duty in regard to it, on any occaſion that preſented itſelf. But envy, ſelfiſhneſs, and other corruptions of our nature, have rendered it difficult exactly to determine what is juſt in every various circumſtance. To remedy this defect in the original law of nature, there is ſo full and admirable a rule delivered us in the Goſpel; that the meaneſt capacity may know by it, when he offends againſt this moral duty: "Do "not to another, what thou wouldſt "not have done to thee." It would be beſide my preſent deſign to enumerate more inſtances to the ſame purpoſe

poſe, or enter further into the merits of this argument: which I am perſuaded, if properly attended to, would contribute to place both the religion of nature and of Chriſt in a fairer and more ſtriking light, than they have been generally repreſented in.

Since virtue then was enjoined us with a view to our happineſs; and the practice of it in ſo eminent a manner contributes to our good here, and our exaltation in the next ſtate; it ſeems a paradox, as the author juſtly obſerves, to ſee mankind in their general conduct continually counteracting the gracious deſigns of their Maker. The uſual ſolution of this difficulty, he affirms to be "falſe in all

" its principles *." That is, man neither came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, nor endued with a freedom of will and action; nor if God had created him both perfect and free, would that in the leaſt have juſtified the introduction of wickedneſs and miſery. We will examine the truth of theſe poſitions ſeparately.

Man's original perfection, he tells us, " is a falſe notion, derived from " the philoſophers of the firſt ages, " founded on their ignorance of the " Origin of Evil, and inability to ac- " count for it on any other hypothe- " ſis †." Which is, in other words,

* Orig. of Evil, p. 97.
† Orig. of Evil, p. 98.

they

they ſuppoſed ſuch a ſtate, becauſe ſuch an hypotheſis appeared to them the moſt rational and probable: an obſervation, which I am ſure does not prove it to be a *falſe notion*. But to this gentleman's bare aſſertion, I will oppoſe the authority of one of the greateſt geniuſes and ſoundeſt philoſophers of all antiquity, who with regard to this matter is very expreſs. "This account of the "happy age, *ſays he*, has been handed "down from the moſt ancient times; "and our anceſtors who lived neareſt "to the firſt revolution of the world "were witneſſes and unexceptionable "afferters of the truth of it *."

* Απεμνημονευετο δε υπο των ημετερων προγονων των πρωτων, οι τελευτωσι μεν τη προτερα περιφορα τον εξης χρονον εγειτονουν, της δε κατ αρχας εφυοντο. τουτων γαρ ουτοι κηρυκες εγενοντο ημιν των λογων.

PLATO Πολιτ:

But

But the author's grand objection to the probability of man's original perfection is, that it would be the alteration of his nature; and that, as ſoon as he became perfect, he muſt ceaſe to be a man. In order to determine the force of this objection, it is neceſſary to enquire what is the true nature of man. Is he not a Being partly ſenſitive, and partly rational? If ſo; the right notion of human nature is either this, "a rational principle, conduct-"ing and governing the inferior paſ-"ſions:" or elſe it is this, "a ra-"tional principle, depreſſed by and ſub-"ject to the tyranny of inordinate paſ-"ſions." If this be the right notion of human nature; the gift of reaſon can ſerve no other purpoſe than that of render-

rendering us miſerable. But all the general diſpenſations of an infinitely good God muſt tend to promote good and happineſs: that is the great center, to which every general diſpenſation of providence tends like a ray from the circle of human life. Such a notion therefore of the nature of man, as ſuppoſes his rational faculties beſtowed upon him only to make him miſerable, muſt be falſe: and conſequently the other notion is the juſt and true one. As reaſon then was graciouſly afforded us by our Creator to regulate the paſſions, unleſs all our ideas of the divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs are very falſe and imperfect, it muſt be ſufficient to anſwer the end. From whence it appears not only probable

but

but clear, from the faireſt deductions of reaſon, that man was originally endued with every quality in the higheſt degree ſuited to his nature, and, if properly exerted, neceſſary to promote his good; which amounts to what is underſtood by man's original perfection.

On the ſuppoſition that man was created perfect; the introduction of moral evil is a ſufficient proof that he was likewiſe created free. But independent of that ſuppoſition, his free-agency may be briefly proved from the author's own conceſſions. He acknowledges man "to have ſuch a degree of "free-will, as to make him accounta-"ble, and juſtly puniſhable for the "abuſe

"abuſe of it." We are juſtly accountable for an action as it is good or evil, only as we have it in our power to perform the one, and avoid the other. If therefore we have a degree of free-will ſufficient to render us accountable and juſtly puniſhable for our actions; we have free-will ſufficient to enable us to avoid the commiſſion of ſuch actions; and that is all the free-will contended for.

Theſe propoſitions then being true, that man was created perfect and free; the conſequence appears to me plain, and the argument concluſive: that therefore the introduction of ſin, or moral evil into the world, is not imputable to God, nor the neceſſary con-

ſequence of human nature: but entirely owing to man's voluntary abuſe of that high yet dangerous truſt repoſed in him, his freedom of will and action. True it is, that his Creator might have put it out of his power to have committed ſin, by endowing him with a greater degree of perfection; but I dare not ſay, "he had much better have done "ſo *." God might have created him a Being neceſſarily determined to what was good; but then he would have been no longer man: both the beauty and reward of virtue would then have been loſt; and this world have been a ſtate of rewards, and not of probation. He from the beginning of time foreſaw the ill uſe that man would make of this

* Orig. of Evil, p. 101.

gift

gift of free-will; and therefore prepared a remedy; the redemption of mankind by the promiſed ſeed who ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head. However ingenious therefore may be the author's conjectures, the rational Enquirer may ſtop here in his ſearch after the Origin of Evil. In endeavouring to inveſtigate it more nicely, he will only be apt to loſe himſelf in the endleſs mazes of error and perplexity. And after all his laborious reſearches into the nature and origin of moral evil; inſtead of finding a more ſatisfactory account of it, than the ſcriptures will help us to, he may be in danger of catching the very worſt, and mother of all evils, Scepticiſm.

SECT. V.

WE have ſeen then that this world was intended to be a ſtate of probation; and ſuch the wiſeſt and moſt thinking men of all ages and nations ſuppoſed it. Man muſt therefore have, beſides the knowledge of good and evil, a freedom of will and action. For if neceſſarily determined to good, where would be the virtue in reſiſting evil? if to evil, where the viciouſneſs in purſuing it? and in either of theſe caſes, where is the trial of his obedience? The abuſe then of this gift of free-will it was, that introduced moral evil into the world; and ſcarce any thing is more

obvious

obvious, than that political evils are the conſequence of moral. If no ſuch thing can at this day be hoped for as a perfect form of government; it is not becauſe mankind are by nature incapable of receiving or retaining it, but becauſe their vices have made them ſo. If we conſider the hydra-nature of vice, one of whoſe heads is ſeldom ſtruck off, but from the prolific trunk ſprout out at leaſt two; if we reflect on the ſtrong force of example, by which the numerous progeny increaſed with mankind, and univerſally diffuſed themſelves: the very notion of a perfect government is abſurd, and the ingenuity of man in the preſent corrupt ſtate of things can in ſpeculation ſcarce effect it. Private vices would be eternally claſhing

with public good: the ſingle vice of avarice, which muſt neceſſarily produce corruption and venality, is alone ſufficient to obſtruct the wheels of the moſt perfect government. But though we muſt diveſt mankind of their vices before we can ſuppoſe them capable of a perfect form of government; we need not diveſt them of their nature. The queſtion therefore is not, whether a perfect form of government can now ſubſiſt, but whether it ever could; that is, whether human nature could ever have been capable of it, or not?

It is an undeniable truth, that man was created for ſociety; and it is equally certain, that the production of happineſs was the divine motive for creating him.

him. Muſt not God then ſeem to counter-act his own gracious purpoſes, in entailing a neceſſity of evil upon this aptitude and diſpoſition for ſociety; which he himſelf with a gracious intention implanted in us? Or, if we think of the Deity reverently and juſtly as we ought; may we not more fairly conclude, that as certainly as we were created for ſociety, we were created to live happily in ſociety? And if the caſe be otherwiſe, if every ſyſtem of government be full of variety of evils; let us enquire into the myſterious cauſe. Neither need we delve far for this: ſince, if we content ourſelves with the author's own relation of facts, it will appear moſt evident, that evils of government are owing univerſally and immediately to moral

evils. There is not in all this black catalogue one ſingle evil enumerated, that does not flow from thence. Tyranny and oppreſſion for inſtance are derived from pride, ſelfiſhneſs, and cruelty; violence and corruption, from avarice and diſſipation; war and deſolation, from envy, luſt, revenge, injuſtice, &c. Since then political evils are manifeſtly deducible from moral; before moral evil was introduced into the world, it is impoſſible that political evils could exiſt. And though the author affects to deſpiſe the common opinion of an original ſtate of innocence; he has not offered one ſingle argument to demonſtrate either the impoſſibility or improbability of it. On the contrary it has been ſhewed, that

ſuch

ſuch a notion is moſt agreeable to the nature of man; that it has been handed down by long tradition, and confirmed by the pens of men of the moſt extenſive learning and higheſt abilities. To this purpoſe innumerable quotations might, from various authors, be alledged; but I will content myſelf with only mentioning his notions of this matter, whoſe authority, of all heathen writers, is moſt to be depended on. Deſcribing the happy age, Plato tells us, that then God was the only Governor; but when the beautiful order of things was perverted, the Deity retired from the helm, and irregularity and confuſion followed. This Platonic Theocracy, agreeable to what was before

fore obſerved †, ſuppoſes that mankind originally lived accountable for their actions to no human magiſtrate, nor ſubject to any human laws: God himſelf as it were immediately governing them by that univerſal law of conſcience ſo deeply imprinted in the mind *. An entire freedom from all reſtraint of laws is always enumerated amongſt the bleſſings of the golden age. From whence it plainly appears, that in their notions of a primæval ſtate the ancient ſages did not, as ſome have preſumed, ſuppoſe only a *more* innocent and happy ſtate than the preſent, but a ſtate of *perfect* happineſs. Since the ſuppoſition of a ſtate, in which vice prevailed without any laws to controul and re-

† Review, Sect. iv.

* Νεμοντος δε εκεινου, πολιτειαι ουκ ησαν. PLATO.

ſtrain

ſtrain it, gives us the idea of a ſtate ſo very wretched, as we want a name to expreſs it by.

Hence, as political evils do confeſſedly reſult from moral *, the ſame reaſoning which has been uſed to prove that moral evil was not neceſſarily conſequential of human nature, includes an anſwer to all arguments of its neceſſary imperfection, drawn from the vaſt train of political evils, that are obſervable in all governments that ſubſiſt, and which ſuperficially examined may ſeem almoſt naturally implicated with them. For could we take away the cauſe, the effect muſt neceſſarily ceaſe. But though to have a perfect

* Enquiry, &c. p. 152.

form

form of government, it be neceſſary to be perfectly virtuous; though at this day we are not to look for a Platonian common-wealth, or Utopia; yet by retrenching the number of our moral evils, we may proportionably abridge our political ones. And conformably to this opinion the author remarks with great truth and propriety, that * "theſe (*viz.* political evils) can "never be removed, until thoſe (mo-"ral evils) are firſt amended." Therefore as theſe imperfections and abuſes in government can only be redreſſed by a reformation of manners; ſuch a reformation every good and worthy man ought to endeavour to effect in his own private capacity; and the legi-

* Enquiry, p. 152.

ſlature

ſtature is more particularly bound to labour after in a publick one. For if, as this gentleman affirms, politicks be a ſcience, as reducible to certainty as the mathematicks; this muſt be one univerſal invariable principle of it, *viz.* the more virtuous a people is, the more great and flouriſhing, the more ſecure, proſperous, and happy that uation will be. This is an inconteſtable truth, and the different periods of every ſtate will afford inſtances of it. But perhaps no ſtate more ſtriking ones than the Roman. Whether Rome owed its greatneſs to its virtue or to chance, is the the ſubject of one of Machiavel's Diſcourſes. But with due deference to the great Florentine; by queſtioning it, he ſeems to have made a doubt

of

of that which would elſe appear abſolutely unqueſtionable. Chance, that is, ſome unforeſeen, unnoticed, unaccountable accidents, may raiſe a ſiege, or win a battle: but I would as ſoon believe Chance capable of building the city, as of raiſing the ſtate from nothing to univerſal empire, in a long and almoſt uninterrupted war of ſix or ſeven hundred years. Nothing could effect this but a ſteady uniform virtue. And how great that virtue was, may be judged from a ſingle anecdote, that one of their own hiſtorians has left us; and which conveys to the reader a more lively idea of it, than whole volumes written on the ſubject afford us. "The "firſt divorce, *ſays* Val. Max. that was "ever heard of in Rome, happened

"in the year of the city 520." How muſt that nation ſuffer in compariſon; in which, if I forget not, an ingenious author has obſerved, that nineteen divorces happened in the ſhort ſpace of one year; amongſt thoſe too who pride themſelves on being accounted people of faſhion. Inviting then as faſhion is, how many more ſeparations may we ſuppoſe to have happened amongſt thoſe of leſs note; who are always fond of aping their ſuperiors, and never more ſo than in their vices!

Since then private vices appear ſo far from being public benefits, that they are the very bane of government: to ſtop the progreſs of moral evil will be the principal ſcope and aim of the truly

truly great miniſter, which he will ſedulouſly endeavour by every probable method, by the authority of his ſtation, and his own example. And hence may be perceived the difference between a good and able miniſter, and the *great little man* which this author has deſcribed; between him who makes it his chief care to promote the good of his country, and him who fancies himſelf placed in that diſtinguiſhed ſphere, only to aggrandize himſelf, his friends, and dependents, and ſecure himſelf in the poſſeſſion of ſo much power and gain. The one will ſupport himſelf by his own greatneſs and intrinſick merit; the other will lay hold on every external aſſiſtance. To an indefatigable attention to buſineſs the one will add

add diſintereſtedneſs and an unſhaken integrity; the other, fraud and low cunning: the one will not devote his time to pleaſure, becauſe many hours that the preſſing duties of his ſtation require will thereby be uſeleſsly ſquander'd away; the other will avail himſelf of it by winning over to his views of intereſt thoſe who are already engaged in the ſame purſuits of pleaſure: the one will defy the voice of envy, the other court its ſilence: the honeſt and upright intentions of the one will appear ſo evident, that fools muſt ſee the good of them, and knaves will not be able to pervert them; the ſelfiſh views of the other muſt be diſguiſed by every art of venality and adulation: the one will confront his enemies, and face their malevolence

with a confidence which nothing can inſpire, but a conſcious ſenſe of having diſcharged his duty; the other in ſuch a ſituation will bear himſelf thro' by effrontery and bribes. According to this repreſentation of things, and in this view only may be reconciled thoſe ſeeming inconſiſtencies, with which this author has, by ſome ſuperficial readers, been charged, in his deſcription of *that little creature, a Great Man.*

SECT.

SECT. VI.

THE ſubject of the Sixth and laſt Letter is *Religious* Evil; of all others, if the author's reaſoning be concluſive, the moſt enormous, and as he himſelf acknowledges, the moſt difficult to be accounted for: I ſhall therefore be indulged the liberty to examine the weight of his arguments the more circumſtantially.

Man is a being formed with paſſions, but endowed with reaſon to govern them; created for ſociety, and therefore, as a great heathen obſerves *, our

* Partim patria, partim parentes, partim amici noſmet ſibi vindicant. Cic. de Off.

country, our parents, and our friends, claim part of our regard. For the better conduct of ourſelves with reſpect to theſe ſeveral relations, agreeably to the dignity of our nature, and the end of our creation, the Almighty has furniſhed us with capacities ſufficient to form ſyſtems of ethicks and polity, and hath ſo far revealed himſelf to us in the book of nature, that we are enabled to trace him in his works, and from ſuch contemplation of his infinite wiſdom, unbounded power, and tranſcendant goodneſs are naturally led to love, fear, honour, and adore him: which amounts to what we underſtand by religion. Ethicks teach us our duty to ourſelves and others; Polity the regard due from us to our country, and our general conduct

duct conſidered as a ſociety or ſtate; and Religion inculcates our duty to that Being, whom we ſtile God, from whom we derive our exiſtence, and on whom that exiſtence depends. And theſe united compleat our character as men. For without ſuch reſult of our reaſon, we ſhall diſcern little excellence in human nature above that of the brute creation: diſtinguiſhed only by an erect poſture, we have the honour to ſtrut about upon two legs, whilſt monkeys and aſſes run upon all four. Strange is it then, if he who *faſhioned us, and underſtandeth all our parts*, does really underſtand ſo little of our nature, and the nature of thoſe endowments, by which he has thus exalted man above the irrational part of the creation; as that thoſe

very faculties, which were intended for our good and happineſs, ſhould, without any will or fault of ours, be conſequentially and inevitably productive of miſery and evil. Or, if he did know it; how * *wonderful* muſt it indeed appear, that Omnipotence ſhould be ſo ſevere and void of all benevolence to his creatures, as to ſuffer them to wander ſo many ages in the dark; and at laſt to afford them a light indeed, but one ſo faint and glimmering, as ſerved only to affright them! A cruel and capricious God truly: And if this was really the caſe, even the ingenuity of the author would find much greater difficulty than he ſeems

* Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil, p. 154.

aware

aware of, in removing the heavy charge he wantonly brings againſt Omnipotence. But, if we examine a little more deeply into this matter, it will appear, that neither the firſt ages of the world walked in abſolute and neceſſary darkneſs, nor, *when the fullneſs of time was come that the Sun of brightneſs ſhould appear*, that this light was imperfect.

If we look back as far as hiſtory will carry us, we ſhall find that the practice of religion was univerſally neither ſo * inhuman, obſcene, ſtupid, nor execrable, as the author has ſuppoſed it. The annual oblation of the fruits of the earth was originally no more than a ta-

* Free Enquiry, &c. p. 155.

cit acknowledgment of the Omnipotence and providence of God, and a ſignificant confeſſion, that whatever is enjoyed in this world is the free-gift of his good will and pleaſure. The ſame may be affirmed of the ſacrifices; in regard to which I cannot but ſmile at this tender-hearted gentleman's compaſſionate concern for the innocent herds and flocks *: the cruelty to which was juſt the ſame then, as is exerciſed now the day before every market throughout this populous city. For the ſlaughtered cattle that were ſacrificed upon feſtivals and ſuch particular occaſions by Princes, Chiefs, and indeed by all perſons proportionably to

* Free Enquiry, p. 160.

their

their rank and condition in life, were not ſtupidly and uſeleſsly burnt to aſhes, but * were broiled and roaſted for the repaſt of their friends, and the entertainment of the poor: and were excellently well calculated to keep alive a ſpirit of hoſpitality †. True it is that ſome nations offered human ſacrifices even to wood and ſtones; yet not as is here aſſerted, *all* nations. For God left not himſelf without witneſs, that even the light of nature which he had implanted in the mind of man, was ſufficient to guide him aright, whilſt

* Vid. Hom. Il. lib. i. ver. 459.

† And hence it is, that we find the penurious man characteriſed by Theophraſtus for *ſelling* part of his victim. Τὸ μὲν ἱερείου πλὴν τῶν ἱερεῶν τὰ κρέα ἀποδιδόσθαι.

the

the mind remained unobſcured by that corruption and depravity to which we were liable, and which gradually took root in our hearts; and ſo long as reaſon maintained her throne in our minds, unſhaken by the perverſeneſs of our will, and our proneneſs to evil. There was a people, that even in the moſt corrupt times retained a true knowledge of the Deity, and worſhiped the true and only God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. But as this light of nature was too faint and glimmering to pierce the almoſt general darkneſs that vice and error had gradually introduced in the world; a more explicit revelation of the divine will was ſeen neceſſary, and therefore graciouſly diſpenſed to us. A

light

light this, neither faint nor glimmering; which terrifies us indeed with the proſpect of future danger, but with no other intent than to enable us to avoid it. This has moſt explicitly informed us, that our ſouls are immortal; it has taught us, that future happineſs will be the reſult of virtue and piety, and that vice as hateful to God will be puniſhed with miſery. That, by having the rewards and puniſhments thus diſtinctly pointed out to us, we might be the more ſtrongly induced, to labour after the one, and cautiouſly to avoid the other. As to the inſufficiency of this light, it ſhall be examined under the four general articles, the author has objected to: *viz.* it's *want of univerſality*; *authenticity*, *perſpicuity and policy*.

Which

Which objection if juſt, the religion as he rightly infers, muſt have been ſoon corrupted; and we might then conclude, as he moſt extravagantly aſſerts, that its great author never deſigned it to be free from any of theſe imperfections. And yet we ſee that this religion of a day, which like a comet was intended only to blaze a little to amuſe the world, and then vaniſh away, has ſubſiſted for theſe ſeventeen hundred years. Perhaps not without ſome corruptions in the ſeveral ſyſtems that have been formed from it: But upon an impartial enquiry it will appear, that thoſe corruptions were owing to the pride, obſtinacy, or ignorance of the ſeveral ſects, and not to any defect in it's original conſtitution.

He

He who can confidently aſſert, that *this religion was revealed only to a ſmall and obſcure corner in parables and myſteries* *, diſcovers little converſe with thoſe writings, that are relative to it. For by theſe we find, that the firſt propagators of it did not confine their labours to *Judæa*, but extended them into all the various parts of the known world. Nor did they ſeek to foiſt their religion upon barbarous and uncivilized nations only, with a view to take advantage of ignorance and credulity: But thoſe moſt poliſhed ſtates of *Greece* and *Rome* were appealed to; and ſeveral of the moſt learned men of thoſe times and places thought it no derogation either to their

* Free Enquiry, &c. p. 162.

learning

learning or wiſdom to embrace chriſtianity. So that moſt juſtly may we conclude with the great apoſtle, who in a ſenſe though not ſtrictly ſimilar affirmed in the moſt publick manner, that *theſe things were not done in a corner.* And as to the parables, in which Chriſt delivered many of his doctrines, ſo plain and obvious are they; that whoever can hear without prejudice, and judge without partiality, may eaſily comprehend them.

He † *guarded not its original purity*, &c. Till there be ſhewn ſufficient reaſon to conclude, that thoſe ſeveral hiſtories of the life of Chriſt are ſpurious; or at leaſt till other authentic hiſtories be produced,

† Free Enquiry, *&c.* p. 162.

in

in which his life and actions are otherwiſe recorded; we may fairly eſteem the original purity of his religion as well guarded, as tho' he had left us a hiſtory of his life under his own hand. For what ends could thoſe deſpiſed, perſecuted men propoſe to ſerve by obtruding errors and falſhood upon the world: who, as the author well obſerves, *were honeſt enough to die for the religion they publiſhed?* And indeed this obſervation, which he unluckily ſtumbled upon, is a full proof of the ſincerity of their intentions; and no bad confirmation of the truth of thoſe doctrines, they were ſo thoroughly convinced of. That this reflection of his would be no great ſervice to the point he is labouring to eſtabliſh, he ſeems aware; and therefore tacks to it a preſumptive aſſertion of his own: *That theſe perſons were notwithſtanding never*

ver wiſe enough to underſtand the doctrines they taught. Whether an inſpired perſon may not be charged with doctrines, not perfectly underſtood by himſelf, is a diſputed point; however peremptorily this gentleman has determined it. Inſpiration according to the preciſe import of the word, implies not men's private conceptions, but doctrines ſuggeſted by divine influence and direction. The authors of the inſpired writings might or might not comprehend the doctrines they promulgated: and which they taught, not becauſe they were underſtood by them, but becauſe they were divinely delegated to them. Their own private comprehenſion therefore of the doctrines they publiſhed, is a matter of no conſequence: it cannot always be clearly aſcertained; much leſs can this author's aſſer-

tion

tion be otherwiſe ſupported, than by ſhewing that they advanced idle articles of faith, which they endeavoured to explain in an abſurd irrational manner. And whenever that is made appear, more of truth may be acknowledged in this letter, than an unprejudiced reader can at preſent reſt convinced of. Hence may be obſerved how roughly the author has handled the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity; whom, if aſſertions may be admitted to paſs for arguments, he has proved to be a ſet of the moſt honeſt blockheads that were ever heard of: who taught, they knew not what; and ſuffered ignominy, pain, and death, they ſcarcely knew why. Yet has this compoſition of ignorance and honeſty founded and eſtabliſhed ſuch a religion

as the moſt poliſhed parts of the world have embraced; and which the moſt inveterate enemies to virtue, with all the artillery of Deiſm, have not been able to overturn; calculated to inform the meaneſt capacities, yet important enough to engage the ſtudies and win the admiration of men of the greateſt abilities. After theſe uncandid invectives againſt the firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity, we muſt not expect that the doctrines they promulgated will fare better in his hands. A little dabbling in divinity is a dangerous thing; and, like a little ſmattering in poetry, claims the friendly admonition, "to drink "deep, or taſte not." His talents as a divine will appear from his critique on the two following paſſages.

* *All policy he diſclaims in expreſs words, ſaying,* "*my kingdom is not of* "*this world:*" *that is, I meddle not with the political affairs of mankind.* Falſe gloſſes and a wilful pervertion of an author's meaning are the laſt wretched ſhifts to which recourſe is had in ſupport of an indefenſible cauſe: but the inference which he labours to draw from the above paſſage, viz. that therefore his doctrine is *againſt* civil policy, will by no means follow even from the interpretation which he himſelf has annexed to the words. In order to arrive at the true ſenſe and meaning of an author, one invariable rule is to conſider the main ſcope and drift of his

* Enquiry, p. 159.

diſcourſe. By which rule let this paſſage of the evangeliſt be tried. The Jews, that they might the more eaſily effect their wicked purpoſe, and procure the death of Jeſus, laboured to render him ſuſpected by Pilate of ſedition and innovation in the ſtate, as ſetting himſelf up for King in oppoſition to the Emperor. Pilate endeavoured by ſeveral indirect queſtions, to come at the truth of theſe inſinuations from his own mouth. "*Thy own* nation, ſaid he, hath deli-
"vered thee unto me." Which artifice Jeſus obſerving, directly anſwered him, "*My* kingdom is not of this
"world: if my kingdom were of this
"world, then would my ſervants fight
"that I ſhould not be delivered into
"the hands of the Jews." That is, I

have

have indeed a kingdom, which I do not deny having profeſſed to eſtabliſh: but as I always inculcated it is not a kingdom of this Preſent world, nor any way tends to cauſe diſturbance in the government. For if it had, my ſervants would have fought, &c.

Nor is the author leſs unhappy in his application of the paſſage next cited by him: *Think not that I come to ſend peace on the earth*, &c. The contents of the chapter in which theſe words occur, are the inſtructions which Chriſt gives his Apoſtles upon ſending them forth into the world on the Grand Errand to which they were appointed. He forewarns them of the difficulties they muſt encounter, and the evils they had to ſtruggle with in their promulga-

tion of the Goſpel; that when thoſe evils did overtake them, they might from their fore-knowledge and expectation of them, bear them with the greater conſtancy and firmer reſolution. "Think "not, *ſays he*, that I am come to ſend "peace on earth, &c." That is: Do not perſuade yourſelves that you may avoid a moſt ſevere trial of your conſtancy; do not expect that the world will entertain a religion ſo deſtructive of luxury, eaſe, and pleaſure, and ſo oppoſite to men's natural luſts and appetites, as is this I come to ſettle, with an implicit reſignation to it, in the love and peaceableneſs of it. By no means: but on the contrary, to ſee you ſacrifice your own eaſe and domeſtick happineſs to the publick cauſe of virtue and religion; to ſee you engage yourſelves in unneceſſary troubles

and

and afflictions when you might have enjoyed peace and ſatisfaction at home, will exaſperate your friends and relations more particularly againſt you, and your bittereſt enemies ſhall be they of your own houſhold. This I humbly conceive to be the true meaning of the paſſage; which reſpected the Apoſtles and firſt converts with their connections, and bore no reference to future ages.

Upon theſe ſuppoſed imperfections in all religions, the Chriſtian not excepted, the author ingeniouſly builds his novel ſcheme: but the truth of thoſe ſuppoſed imperfections, as far as we have proceeded, appearing weak and groundleſs, the ſuperſtructure muſt of courſe fall to the ground. Triumphant however

however in the diſcovery of imperfections, which exiſt not but in his own imagination, he thus breaks forth: * *From what inſcrutable ſource do all theſe imperfections derive their exiſtence?* Some ſource aſtoniſhing indeed, and remote from ordinary underſtandings, yet not altogether *inſcrutable.* Since it ſeems that Omnipotence has to him committed the keys of knowledge: has graciouſly vouchſafed to unravel to him all his myſterious plan of diſpenſing to us: has to him accounted, why he has attributed to mankind juſt reaſon enough to make them miſerable, and juſt enough religion to enable them to worſhip him in the darkneſs of ignorance and error. How eaſy do the moſt

* Enquiry, &c. p. 160.

abſtruſe

abſtruſe matters appear to us, when once explained; and how ſtrange it ſeems, that no one before him ſhould have hit upon this lucky conceit! "That * man is naturally imperfect, "and therefore incapable of receiving "a perfect religion." But it muſt be obſerved that perfection is a term merely relative; and therefore it may juſtly be aſked, what degree of perfection the author here intends. As to abſolute perfection, we do not arrogate it; neither do we aſcribe it to beings of a much ſuperior nature: it is an attribute that can only be appropriated to the Deity himſelf. All that we contend for is, what every other ſpecies of created Beings is allowed to have, perfection in

* Enquiry, p. 162.

our

our nature: which I underſtand the old ſchool axiom, *Omne ens eſt perfectum*, to ſignify.

In explication of this impracticability of imparting to mankind a perfect religion, the author obſerves there are but two methods by which this can be effected; either by the deductions which God empowers them to make by the force of natural reaſon, or by the extraordinary interpoſition of divine revelation. The firſt, after ſome pertinent reflections upon the nature of it, and thoſe difficulties that muſt neceſſarily attend it, and elegant deductions from its known effect unaſſiſted by revelation, he concludes to be ineffectual. And in order to prove the other method equally

ſo,

ſo, he has recourſe to the above-mentioned hypotheſis, the imperfection of man, and therefore his incapability of receiving a perfect religion. It muſt be confeſſed that Omnipotence cannot impart knowledge to creatures, of which he has made them naturally incapable, without at the ſame time changing their natures. He can not inſtruct a mole in aſtronomy, or an oyſter in muſic; without imparting to them faculties neceſſary for the acquiſition of thoſe ſciences: and then that is no longer a mole, nor this an oyſter. But though the nature of theſe creatures be imperfect, yet, as was before obſerved, who doubts that they are perfect in their nature? Or, to explain myſelf more clearly, every faculty that they poſſeſs

is

is in the higheſt degree adapted to the nature of each ſpecies, and the uſes that they have occaſion to make of them. Now man, though the loweſt in the chain of intellectual beings, is yet endowed with a faculty above the brute creation, which we call reaſon. And it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that this faculty, rightly and properly exerted, is not ſo far adequate and perfect, as to anſwer all the purpoſes it was intended for, or we have occaſion to make of it. By it we are enabled to diſcern that there is a God; which is the foundation of all religion. And indeed, that he has ordained ſuch duties, as religion requires of us, the author ſeems not to deny: in that he acknowledges * *the Chriſtian reli-*

* Enquiry, p. 158.

gion

gion to have ſomething ſupernatural in it. Surely then moſt ſevere is the lot of mankind, who are indued with a faculty, which enables them to diſcover that there are certain duties to be performed to God and their fellow-creatures, which are neceſſary to their happineſs: and yet, though it has pleaſed God explicitly to reveal himſelf to us upon theſe points, that nevertheleſs this faculty ſhould be incapable of diſcerning what theſe duties are. For in the name of goodneſs what end does the mere knowledge that there is a religion ſerve; if our faculties are abſolutely incapable of knowing what that religion is, and wherein it conſiſts? For my own part, I have more extenſive ideas of the Divine Goodneſs, and the capacity of the human mind. But that a mat-

a matter of ſuch importance may not depend upon my ideas, or even thoſe of the ingenious author; let us reſt the truth upon fact, and not ſurmiſe: let us examine, whether the religion, which confeſſedly appears to have the faireſt pretenſions to be a perfect religion, be really defective in thoſe general points which the author has eſtabliſhed as the true criteria of perfection: Univerſality, Authenticity, Perſpicuity, and Policy.

SECT.

SECT. VII.

BY the want of Univerſality is underſtood, as he explains himſelf; * *that whenever and wherever a religion was firſt revealed, there muſt have been times and places, in which it was not revealed.* This aſſertion, tho' advanced as an unqueſtionable truth, a reader little diſpoſed to cavil may juſtly object to: and the proof of it will be found a more difficult taſk than the ingenious author might be aware of, as well as attended with ſuch ſuppoſitions as I truſt he would never aſſume. For if the world did not exiſt from all eter-

* Enquiry, p. 168.

nity,

nity, neither was univerſally peopled at the time it begun to exiſt; in confutation of both which hypotheſes we have the concurrent teſtimony of reaſon, hiſtory, and tradition: then it muſt be acknowledged at leaſt poſſible, *that a religion might be firſt revealed; when there were neither times nor ſocieties, in which it was not revealed.* Nor is ſuch a thing only barely *poſſible*; but I am authoriſed by hiſtory to think, that there was a religion imparted to the firſt man. Reaſon too ſeems to confirm me in this opinion: elſe how ſhall we account for thoſe various religions, or rather thoſe various modes of religion, which in a ſhort time ſo univerſally diffuſed themſelves through all ſocieties on the earth: unleſs we allow them to have been

been the outlines or ſhadows of the religion originally imparted to mankind, depraved and corrupted from its ancient purity: the neceſſary conſequence of its having no other foundation, than the natural impulſe of conſcience, and the inſtability and variableneſs of tradition. If then we enquire into the nature of that original religion, it is not unreaſonable to take our account from the moſt ancient hiſtory extant, which is the Moſaic Hiſtory of the Creation. According to which we find, that in the days of the firſt man the Sabbaoth was appointed, Marriage was inſtituted, and Prayer and Adoration were made to the Deity. Here is plainly the ſubſtance of that religion, the Perfecter and Finiſher of which, from the very

beginning of time, was promiſed: he, *whoſe heel ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head.* For the end of Chriſt's coming was not to aboliſh the old and fundamental religion, but to perfect it: he came not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfill it. Hence then the Chriſtian religion appears to be nothing new, no novel ſyſtem, no other than the perfection of that religion, originally imparted to mankind: Whilſt there exiſted neither times nor ſocieties in which it was not publiſhed. And thus will it, without any falſe gloſſes or forced conſtructions, bear the teſt of univerſallity, which the author contends for. Nor is it unworthy notice to obſerve how, by a train of providential diſpenſations, the Divine Being continued gradually to clear up that religion

from its original obſcurity; and encreaſe the faint glimmerings he had at firſt afforded, by ſending at various periods, patriarchs, prophets, and holy men of old, to prepare the world for a reception of that light which the Sun of Brightneſs diffuſed, when the fullneſs of time was come.

But if he contend for an univerſality of religion in a more unlimited ſenſe than this; if his meaning be, that an univerſal religion is that which muſt have been alike revealed to all men and at all times: the argument, which is taken from the juſtice of God, proceeds upon a falſe foundation, and deſtroys itſelf by proving too much. For by the ſame way of arguing, may we not arraign the juſtice of

theDeity in affording to the poor wretches in Hudſon's Bay ſcarce the mere neceſſaries of life, whilſt on Italy and other happy parts of the globe he hath dealt out with a liberal hand not only all the neceſſaries, but all the comforts and elegancies of life? Why has his providence permitted the knowledge of arts and ſciences to illumine Europe in ſo diſtinguiſhed a manner; whilſt the Africans are in a great meaſure as ignorant, barbarous, and uncivilized as the very ſavages in their deſarts? And to carry the argument ſtill further, Why is one man ſuffered to labour under the preſſure of miſery, infamy, and want; and another equally or perhaps more undeſerving of the bleſſings of providence, permitted to enjoy affluence, pleaſure, and eſteem?

eſteem? Theſe things are obvious to the ſenſes, and therefore ſpeak for themſelves: or he, who can deny God the power to grant advantages to one man above another in any one reſpect, would be ready to deny him the ſame power in all reſpects whatever. The truth is, if we look through the world, we ſhall find that an equal diſtribution of the goods, as they are termed, of nature or of fortune, is not the method God has choſe in diſpenſing to mankind: but he has afforded them different natural endowments, as well as different opportunities of improving them. And yet notwithſtanding theſe ſeeming inequalities in his various diſpenſations to mankind; he, who is all perfection, muſt be infinitely juſt. In ſhort, there

lies in this reſpect the very ſame objection againſt the religion of nature, as againſt revelation; the want of univerſality being equally objectible to the one as to the other. All men's capacities are not equal; ſome are endued with a quicker underſtanding and more ready perception of things than others; capable of diſtinguiſhing truth from falſhood more clearly; and from thence derive great advantages in the exerciſe of theſe duties they ſo diſtinctly diſcern, over men of ſlower parts and inferior abilities. The argument therefore can really prove no more than this; that there will be a time, when all thoſe ſeeming partialities will be accounted for, and the ways of God fully juſtified to man. If it

be

be aſked how thoſe will be treated, who never had an opportunity of enjoying the Goſpel Diſpenſation, on this and ſuch other points as the Scriptures have left undetermined, I imagine every man at liberty to indulge his own reveries; of this however aſſured, that whatever theſe allotments may be, they are the appointments of infinite Wiſdom and Juſtice.

The authenticity of the Scriptures has, by the moſt able and learned men, been ſo fully and ſo clearly proved, that I ſhall not preſume to enter farther into this point, than is abſolutely neceſſary to remove the objections this author has ſtarted againſt it. The main ſtreſs of which ſeems to reſt upon this aſſertion:

" that granting a man to be inſpired,
" yet it ſeems utterly impracticable,
" that he ſhould ever produce indu-
" bitable credentials of a divine com-
" miſſion to others, who are uninſpired."
That we may not diſpute about words, it will not be amiſs to come to an explanation of terms. By Inſpiration then I ſuppoſe I am to underſtand a divine conveyance of certain ſupernatural truths to the mind. Now the end of all inſpiration, and ſome end it muſt have, is to enforce the belief of thoſe truths, which the inſpired perſon is charged with the promulgation of. If therefore this divine commiſſion be by nature incapable of being made appear to all thoſe for whoſe good and happineſs it was deſigned and promulgated; this

gift

gift of inſpiration ſerves no purpoſe; the conferring of it upon any perſon is unneceſſary; and therein God conſequently acts in vain: which is an aſſertion ſo wild and extravagant, as every act of reaſon, and every tenet in philoſophy diſclaim. The queſtion then is, How are we to know when any man is inſpired? When I ſee a perſon perform things which are infinitely beyond the ordinary operations of nature: when I ſee ſickneſs and diſeaſe flee before him; whoſe touch reſtores ſight to the blind; who by his word commands the lame to walk, and even revives the dead: ſuch a perſon I muſt conclude to be ſome way ſuper-naturally empowered. Dæmons indeed, for aught I can aſſert againſt their power, may poſſibly have permiſſion

permiſſion and authority to enable men to perform theſe or the like works. But when I ſee theſe works wrought in confirmation, and to ſupport a more compleat ſyſtem, of virtue and morality, than the greateſt philoſophers and wiſeſt legiſlators were ever able to compoſe: a ſyſtem, which, whilſt it forms the manners, irradiates the mind with ſo clear truths, that the greateſt lights of human reaſon were comparatively but ſo many faint and glimmering lamps, which ſerved rather to amuſe the mind, than to inform it; to baniſh the gloom and horrors of diſſolution, rather than to preſent us with a clear proſpect of immortality. When this is the caſe, I will not heſitate to pronounce that perſon divinely inſpired; and as ſuch, of right

to

to command my aſſent to the truth of thoſe doctrines he profeſſes to teach. The other part of the author's argument alludes to the diſtance of time ſince the tranſaction of thoſe facts under conſideration. But this argument, was it to be admitted as ſuch, would prove equally ſtrong and concluſive againſt our aſſenting to any of the beſt atteſted and moſt univerſally acknowledged facts that are reported in hiſtory. It is true, hiſtory is not capable of mathematical demonſtration. It cannot be proved that Julius Cæſar was ſtabbed in the Senate-houſe, or Richard the IIId. ſlain in Boſworth-field, ſo demonſtratively as it may, that the three angles of every triangle are equal to two right ones: yet I believe the aſ-

certain-

certainment of thoſe facts, as firmly, as I do the demonſtration of this. And wherever the teſtimony of all hiſtorians, who have recorded any fact, is general and concurrent; the circumſtances of facts thus repreſented, I think I may, without the imputation of credulity, reſt perſuaded of; and cannot without incurring the cenſure of obſtinate and dangerous ſcepticiſm deny. But when, beſides the concurrent teſtimony of all who have treated of any point, it happened that ſuch their accounts were publiſhed, whilſt the eye-witneſſes of thoſe facts were moſtly living; and amongſt perſons, who, had they been falſe, were both intereſted and diſpoſed to prove the falſity of them, obtained ſuch univerſal credit, that no cotemporary wri-

ter

ter has denied, or even queſtioned the truth of them; they have then all the marks of truth that hiſtory is capable of: and what was true ſeventeen hundred years ago, muſt be equally ſo now.

That facts are liable to be miſrepreſented by prejudice and ſelf-intereſt I readily allow: allow too, if the author pleaſes, that matters of religion are more expoſed to ſuch miſrepreſentations than things of more ordinary concern. But I believe prejudice and ſelf-intereſt have leſs aſcendancy over the minds of thoſe who have appeared in defence of Chriſtianity, than of thoſe in general who have declared themſelves againſt it. Let the religion be true or falſe, unleſs the advocate

vocate for it be thoroughly perſuaded of the truth of it, why ſhould he labour to involve poſterity in error. He manifeſtly declares, that he does not believe on the bare authority of thoſe who believed before him; in that he puts the truth of his faith to the teſt of reaſon and argument. The dignified prieſt enjoys the benefit and dignity which reſult from his profeſſion, if that religion be falſe; and what can he do more, be it ever ſo true? How therefore is his temporal intereſt concerned in the truth of it; or what ſelfiſh prejudices has ſuch a man to ſtruggle with? But on the contrary, a religion, which hangs like a clog upon bad men's conſciences, which reſtrains their pleaſures, and thwarts their appetites and inclinations, will naturally poſſeſs

poſſeſs them with ſtrong prejudices againſt it. Accordingly we find, that thoſe of the moſt profligate and libertine lives are generally its greateſt adverſaries. Their lives make them wiſh it to be falſe: and it is an eaſy tranſition, from wiſhing to believing.

Its ſpeculative doctrines likewiſe, the author obſerves, muſt want perſpicuity: and not only the ſpeculative points of a divinely inſtituted religion, but alſo thoſe of nature are beyond our comprehenſion. I cannot tell how the ſoul acts upon the body; but that it does ſo act, is a matter therefore not leſs true. So I am told, that the dead ſhall be raiſed incorruptible, and I believe it; how

how they are to be thus raiſed, is not explained to me; nor am I ſollicitous to know. And when the author of this letter will demonſtrate in what manner ſpirit acts upon matter, I will in return, for that ſecret, engage to illuſtrate any the moſt abſtruſe and ſpeculative doctrines in the Chriſtian Religion. There can not lie any real objection againſt it, becauſe ſome of its ſpeculative doctrines are exalted above human reaſon; ſo long as there is nothing contradictory, nothing repugnant to reaſon in the whole ſcheme of Chriſtianity. So long as its practical duties are clear and obvious to the meaneſt capacities; matters of ſpeculation it may include, which are beyond the reach of the moſt refined reaſoners clearly

clearly to explain: probably intended as an inducement to men of learning and abilities, to employ their talents on a ſubject of ſo great and general concern. Man is by nature curious and aſpiring; fond of what is abſtruſe, and apt to deſpiſe things that are plain and eaſy, merely becauſe they are ſo:

Tranſvolat in medio poſita, & fugentia captat.

Objects the more remote they lye from the pale of human knowledge, the more ſtrongly engage our attention, and excite our ambitious reſearches. Suppoſing Chriſtianity comprized nothing but a ſet of plain practical precepts; might not that be a reaſon for our

faſtidious nature to reject the divinity of it? And if ſo, does not that very argument, which the Freethinker alledges againſt the divinity of the Chriſtian Religion, tend ſtrongly to enforce the truth of it? Surely I am not to refuſe my aſſent to all ſpeculative points, which the ſcanty line of human reaſon cannot reach; when it is required of me by the precepts of a religion, the divinity of which that ſame reaſon by many other clear and inconteſtable proofs evinces. Human reaſon can never enable me to comprehend all myſteries; yet may it direct me, when there is ſufficient grounds for my belief of them. In ſhort, what is above my reaſon, it requires no great degree of credulity to believe on the authority of a

divine revelation: and no point that contradicts my reaſon, does ſcripture require my aſſent to.

But then its practical precepts are ſo far from falling under any charge of obſcurity, are ſo clear and obvious, that he who runs may read and comprehend them. And nothing but a ſtrong affectation of ſingularity could have betrayed the author into an aſſertion, to uſe his own words, ſo very *extraordinary* as, "that "even its practical and moral precepts "muſt be likewiſe obſcure." And then without offering the ſhadow of an argument in ſupport of ſo falſe and arbitrary an aſſertion, he gravely ſets himſelf to account for the neceſſity of it. And this he endeavours, upon the ſtrength of an hypotheſis elſewhere laid

down, *viz.* "That Omnipotence could "not prevent moral evil from coming "into the world." If this be not ſetting bounds to Omnipotence, I know not what is. Omnipotence indeed cannot work contradictions: it cannot make a line at the ſame time a ſtraight line and a curve; nor two things equal and unequal at the ſame time; it cannot at one and the ſame time exclude moral evil from the world, and ſuffer it to be introduced. Yet this inability ariſes not from any limited power in God, but from the neceſſity of things. He can make a curved line ſtraight, and again, a ſtraight line he can make a curve; by deſtroying the equality he can make two equal things unequal; and he could as eaſily have excluded moral

moral evil from the world, as permitted it to be introduced. And the reaſon why it was ſuffered to be introduced, can never be, that it *could* not, but that it was *better* not to have been excluded *. However, granting the author the truth of his hypotheſis, if we reduce his argument into form, we ſhall find it ſtands thus: "God, who "could not prevent moral evil from "coming into the world, can much "leſs be ſuppoſed able to extirpate it, "when once introduced; therefore all "precepts of moral virtue that he can "communicate to man muſt be ob"ſcure:" or rather, in my humble opinion, therefore all ſuch precepts muſt be imperfect: or indeed, if any conclu-

* See Review, p. 57, 58.

ſion can be properly drawn from theſe premiſes, it muſt be this, "that there-"fore all precepts of virtue are abſo-"lutely vain." From hence may be obſerved, how inconcluſive are the reaſonings of the moſt ingenious men; when out of an affected ſingularity they give too great ſcope to the flight of their own vague fancies, and would appear to think more deeply than all the world that went before them: who, by endeavouring to ſoar too high in ſearch of light, are moſt apt to loſe themſelves amidſt the clouds of error.

The laſt general objection is, its want of policy; by which is meant, as the author explains himſelf *, that it does not preſcribe rules for the government of

* Enquiry, p. 179.

ſtates

ſtates and empires; a point in which I have the ſatisfaction to find myſelf entirely of his opinion; neither does it eſtabliſh rules, or afford us any directions for the conducting of fleets and armies. No man in his ſenſes ever ſuppoſed Chriſtianity to comprehend all arts and ſciences. Religion is one thing; policy is another. This preſcribes regulations for the government of ſtates and communities; and that profeſſes to direct us in our duty to God, ourſelves, and others. In general, policy is oppoſed to barbariſm, as religion is to vice. All therefore that can be required of religion in this view is, that it claſh not with civil polity: and no defect can with any propriety be imputed to it, becauſe it includes no rules of government; ſo long as its precepts go hand in hand

with

with ſuch principles of policy, as if ſtrictly adhered to cannot fail to render a people flouriſhing and great. And that ſuch is the nature of the religion under conſideration, is one of thoſe plain truths that need no proof. A religion, the precepts of which tend to make us affectionate parents, dutiful children, faithful friends, and worthy citizens, muſt promote virtue; and virtue, in ſpite of all refinements on Machiavilian policy, will make us brave. It has been prettily obſerved, that the Greeks and Romans expreſſed virtue and bravery indifferently by the ſame word: thereby implying the neceſſary and inſeparable connection between them. And indeed we ſhall always find virtue and true courage in the ſame breaſt; they

are

are congenial, and will ever be inſeparable companions *.

If it be true, that Venality, Perfidy, Corruption, and a general encouragement of Profligacy and Vice, be the principles of government beſt calculated to promote the greatneſs and proſperity of a nation; the principles of Chriſtianity are moſt incompatible with the rules and principles of ſound polity. But on the contrary, if upon a ſtrict and impartial enquiry it ſhould appear, that in whatever ſtate the duties of morality were moſt ſtrictly obſerved, and theſe oppoſite principles were leaſt prevailing; proportionably happier, more formidable

* ——— *Curius quid ſentit, & ambo*
Scipiadæ? Quid Fabricius, maneſquæ Camilli?
Quid Cremeræ legio, & cannis conſumpta Juventus,
Tot bellorum animæ? Juv. Sat. II.

and

and independent the ſtate of that people was: if the ruin of Athens, Sparta, and Rome be by their own hiſtorians aſcribed to the malignant influence of ſuch principles as theſe: as well the introduction of ſuch principles, as the encouragement of them when introduced, muſt be impolitick. For it is an axiom as true in politicks as in philoſophy, "that "a ſimilarity of cauſes will produce "ſimilar effects."

From this view of things then it appears, that corruption, venality, and a total diſſipation of manners, are not more contrary to the precepts of our religion, than the rules of ſound polity: conſequently that religion, which in every article fundamentally combats thoſe vices, and diſcourages them, muſt conduce

duce to the good of the ſtate. And therefore, though it does not immediately preſcribe rules of government; yet as it co-operates with, and enforces principles of, the beſt and ſureſt policy, it may be deemed ſtrictly political; and even on prudential and temporary motives, deſerves to be encouraged. Principles of government founded on an encouragement of vice, however warmly recommended, however occaſionally uſeful to a weak or profligate miniſtry, muſt always be prejudicial to the ſtate. Such arts are at beſt but a bad varniſh to hide real defects, like the rouge on the face of a town coquet; which by a preſent addition of falſe and adventitious charms deludes the eye of the ſuperficial admirer, yet in reality poiſons the beauties it is intended

to

to inhance, and ſecretly ſaps the conſtitution.

The judicious author of the *Preſent State of Europe* lays down this maxim: to uſe his own words: "As a point of "very great conſequence in politicks, "That religious principles are much "more capable of ſuſtaining and ſupporting a firm and determined cou-"rage, than either political notions or "views of intereſt. Which ſhould in-"duce ſtateſmen to be very cautious "of running down religion in general; "that can never have any better effect, "than corrupting and daſtardizing ſuch "as are deluded into thoſe looſe ſenti-"ments: for this is an infallible max-"im, That he who does not think "himſelf

" himſelf accountable to God, will ne-
" ver do any thing worthy of a man."

Now upon ſuppoſition of a religion's being defective in theſe four points above-mentioned, which the author has eſtabliſhed as the teſt of perfection; his concluſion is juſt: that it muſt ſoon be corrupted. But I truſt there is a religion, that has been proved to want none of theſe marks of perfection; I firmly believe the reformed religion of this land to be that religion, which was promulgated by Chriſt and his Apoſtles; and that this religion will appear to a candid and judicious mind able to bear the ſtricteſt examination; will acquire new luſtre from the niceſt ſcrutiny, and by freſh evidences of its truth,

come

come forth with greater clearneſs, like real gold from the refiner's fire. But it is ſtrange to ſee this paradoxical writer endeavouring to account for the neceſſary corruption of a religion upon principles, which, if any principles can, are moſt indiſputably beſt calculated to preſerve it pure. "* When a religion, "*ſays he*, is believed to be divine, it "will be received; when received, "ſupported; and to ſupport it, an or-"der of men muſt be maintained to "explain its precepts, and enforce the "practice of them: which amounts to "a national eſtabliſhment." Why really theſe means do appear to the groſſneſs of common ſenſe the moſt effectual for preſerving the purity of a re-

* Enquiry, p. 180.

ligion:

ligion. A religion put upon this footing will be leſs liable either to be miſtaken by ignorance, or wilfully perverted; than when truſted to every man's particular humour or fancy; and perhaps the partiality of ſome darling vice. As a veſſel, that has a pilot to direct its courſe, is more likely to proceed aright, than one that is committed to the wildneſs and caprice of every wind that blows. In this manner thought the wiſeſt legiſlators in all ages; and to preſerve the purity of that religion they eſteemed beſt, they made it national. But common ſenſe is fit only for common folks; and the wiſeſt legiſlators are mere dolts in reaſoning, when ſet in competition with modern freethinkers. For it ſeems, as ſoon as a religion

is

is thus eſtabliſhed, it immediately becomes ſo intimately connected with the private intereſts of thoſe who are maintained to propagate its doctrines, and guard its purity; that they will *therefore*— be the more likely to corrupt it. Excellent concluſion! No: before it becomes eſtabliſhed, when the prieſts are paid according to the number of believers they can procure; bad men might then be tempted to make their religion ſubſervient to their worldly concerns; might ſay and unſay; and compaſs ſea and land to gain one proſelyte. But from the minute that religion becomes nationally eſtabliſhed, theſe ſelfiſh motives for perverting it are at an end. He, whoſe office it is to preſerve it pure, and who enjoys the advantages

advantages reſulting from ſuch an employ; labours againſt his own intereſt in attempting to corrupt it. Since as long as it continues in it's original purity, ſo long will he remain poſſeſſed of the emoluments annexed to his profeſſion. He muſt therefore be knave and fool, who either himſelf endeavours to corrupt it, or does not, as far as in him lies, prevent the ſiniſter views of thoſe who would. For when once corrupted, it may, with the more eaſe and ſucceſs, be attacked; and the more open it lies to attacks, in the more danger is it of being demoliſhed: and with a new Form of Religion, a new Order of Prieſts muſt of courſe ſucceed.

Thus have I circumſtantially followed the author, as far as the ſhadow of an argument is advanced by him. All beyond is mere declamation; and to endeavour to anſwer declamation by argument, is labouring to lay hold on that which has nothing real in it, and waſting ſtrength upon the deſert air. If his well-worded harangue be levelled, as is ſeemingly profeſſed, againſt the church of *Rome*; let us take the ſcriptures for our guide, and we ſhall find that the doctrines of that church are not only not authorized by, but are incompatible with, the Goſpel; and that therefore the doctrines, which it profeſſes, are not the doctrines of Chriſtianity, but of an

unwieldy polity, which borrowed the pretext of religion to ſupport itſelf. For as the moſt perfect things may be corrupted by power and pride; ſo alſo was Chriſtianity itſelf. But there is in truth ſomething ſo irreſiſtible, as will in the end force its way thro' all the errors, that knavery and folly can throw around it.

So the pure limpid ſtream, when foul with
ſtains
Of ruſhing torrents, and deſcending rains,
Works itſelf clear. ———

ADD.

And indeed the reformation of our religion carries with it, like its original propagation, the moſt evident ſtamp of

divinity. In reſpect to this point, a learned and ingenious writer expreſſes himſelf thus particularly*. "The ac-
"cidental occaſion whereupon, the
"ſlender means whereby, the low and
"abject condition of, the perſon by
"whom ſo good a work was ſet on
"foot, which in our adverſaries begets
"contempt, fills me with wonder, and
"is the very ſame objection the inſo-
"lent Pagans firſt caſt at Chriſt and
"his Diſciples."

Before I ſhake hands with the author, I beg leave to aſk one general queſtion: which is, what end the Freethinker, for ſo the champions of vice and immorality are pleaſed to ſtyle themſelves, pro-

* Sir *Thomas Browne's* Relig. Medici.

poſes

poſes to ſerve by his cavils and diſputes againſt religion. Is it to diſplay his talents? He would chuſe a leſs momentous ſubject, if he conſidered how much he riſked upon the ſtrength of his arguments. Or is it with a view to ſubvert all religion, and knock off the ſhackles of conſcience? A public-ſpirited deſign truly, and not unworthy public notice! For let us ſuppoſe their attempts to have ſucceeded according to their warmeſt expectations. Let us conclude with the atheiſt, that the exiſtence of a God, and the immortality of the ſoul, are mere figments; a device of politicians calculated for the meridian of credulity: or, if this be more than is contended for, let us with the deiſts preſume, that the divine Being ſecludes himſelf from any concerns

with

with this world, or us who inhabit it: And, like the god of Epicurus's making, ſits in the heaven of heavens, enveloped in his own greatneſs; ——

——— *Natura* ———

— Procul a noſtris rebus ſejunctaque longe
Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur irâ.

Let us ſuppoſe Virtue and Vice univerſally allowed to be mere ſounds, *ſine pondere voces*; this a bugbear, and the other a bubble: framed to deter and lure, and employed againſt the underſtandings of the credulous and ignorant, as theſe are uſed to terrify or amuſe the minds of children. In ſhort; Let us conſider ourſelves as a nation of modern Free-

Freethinkers: and fraud, injuſtice, rapine, oppreſſion, and every act of unreſtrained ſelfiſhneſs muſt, like a torrent, pour in upon us. Every thing will be centered in our own dear ſelves, and every action of our lives muſt neceſſarily have reſpect to our own pleaſures and intereſt. Becauſe, if according to the poet, there be really nothing beyond the grave, nothing to engage our hopes and fears after this life, there is all the reaſon in the world why we ſhould take that Poet's advice, and ſpend our little pittance of time here in as much pleaſure and indulgence as we poſſibly can. And in order the moſt effectually to accompliſh this ſo worthy end of living, to our own pleaſures and indulgence, every other motive muſt be ſacrificed.

We

We ſhall have all the paſſions and appetites of brutes, and in our narrow breaſts juſt a ſufficient degree of reaſon to inform us how to gratify them in the moſt unlimited manner. If it was once thoroughly credited, that we live only for ourſelves, ſelf-intereſt and our preſent enjoyment muſt naturally be the ſpring of all our actions. Pity, charity, publick ſpirit, and every ſentiment moſt worthy the human mind, and moſt beneficial to ſociety, muſt as neceſſarily be excluded or repelled. We ſhould guard every avenue to pity, becauſe it hurts us with the contemplation of miſery, and interrupts our preſent tide of happineſs. We ſhould expend nothing in charity; becauſe that expence might furniſh out ſome delicacy to our table,

table, or ſome additional ornament to our houſe; ſomething that would indulge our appetite, or flatter our ambition. And as the publick good muſt of courſe be continually claſhing with our own intereſt; it is no difficult matter to diſcern, which would be made ſubſervient to the other by men of ſuch a caſt. Thus circumſtanced, what could we expect as a nation, but ruin? And as individuals, what ſhould we have to hope for hereafter, but what is beneath all hope, and ſhocking to nature, annihilation?

Such is, without exaggeration, the picture of a nation moulded according to the principles of modern Deiſm. And whether theſe principles, or thoſe

of virtue founded upon a juſt and rational expectation of future Rewards and Puniſhments, be the beſt calculated to maintain the greatneſs and independence of a people, let reaſon and experience determine.

THE END

MVSEVM BRITANNICVM

ERRATA.

Page
42 *l.* 11. for *diſlikes* read *admires*.
ib. f. *admires* r. *diſlikes*.
54 *l.* 13. f. *the* inferior *paſſions* r. *the paſſions*.
ib. l. 17. f. *this be* r. *this* latter *be*.
75 *l.* 2. f. *political* r. *religious*.
106 *l.* 15. f. *univerſallity* r. *univerſality*.
114 *l.* 4. f. *in confirmation, and* r. *in confirmation* of, *and*
116 *l.* 13. f. *it* happened *that* r. *it* happen *that*.
129 *note, l.* 2. f. maneſquæ *camilli* r. maneſque *camilli*.